

Facilitated Recreational Activity Groups

An arena for social development?

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Abstract

Facilitated recreational activity groups are important for persons with disabilities as it gives them the opportunity to be part of a community where they can experience being accepted for who they are and that they are of importance to people other than their family. It might also be an arena where they can discover that other persons can relate to their situation. The need to create meaningful relationships with peers is just as important to persons with disabilities as they are to “normal” persons. The leaders in a facilitated recreational group play a major role in creating this type of environment through their work with the group as well as being positive role models.

Research question

The main research question in this paper is; in what way do the leaders of a facilitated recreational activity group create an environment that promotes social development?

In addition I have a few sub-questions that will help me when doing my observations. Are the leaders using positive communication when communicating with the participants? Do the leaders make sure all participants are included in the activities? And how do they include everyone? Are the leaders giving the participants socially valid roles? Do the leaders show signs of active listening while talking to the participants? Are the activities adapted to the needs of the participants? These are the questions I am trying to answer in this research.

Methods

This research is a qualitative study, built on observations conducted in a facilitated recreational activity group for adults with developmental disabilities. The data in the analytical part of this text is based on observations conducted in one facilitated recreational activity group in the winter of 2013/14. The observation objects were the leaders of this specific group, and the goal of my observations was to find methods the leaders use, if any, in creating an environment that promoted social development for the participants.

Main findings

The leaders create an environment that promotes social development through social inclusion, recognition and acceptance of the participants as individuals and as a group, adaption of activities to the participants' abilities and interests as well as in the way they communicate with the participants. It is important that the leader is a role model for the members. To be a role model for problem solving and by underlining certain values and attitudes that is positive for the group's development gives the group leader a central function as a process creator within the group. Their goal is to make the group a resource to the individual person. It is important that the leader acknowledges and stimulates those resources that are available within a group

Conclusive comments

Leaders have an important role when it comes to creating a developing process within a group. These points can, or should, involve planning and initiating, as well as suggesting, informing, clarifying, interpreting, supporting and adapting activities that are beneficial for the group and their development. When all this is in place, a facilitated recreational activity group can function as an arena for social development, and can help give adults with disabilities a better perception of themselves and a feeling of belonging. From my findings during my observations I have seen that all the elements needed for social development is present as the situation is today. The participants are given socially valid roles within the group, the leaders encourages them to participate, the participants are creating meaningful relationships with each other as well as with the leaders, and the leaders are communicating with the participants in a positive way and actively listening to the participants' need, wishes and general conversation.

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1 Introduction

According to Eva Nordland, all people develop in contact with everything living. She states that through cooperation with the family, close friends, work, organizations and the general society, people evolve and learn. It is through a stimulating and positive environment that person's develop, both socially and personally (Nordland, 2010).

In a grand society where people are constantly on the move, families often live next to each other without knowing each other. The lack of knowledge gives a poor fundament for community and networking. There are many aspects in today's culture and way of living that, according to Nordland, are leading in the direction of social decline. Aspects such as

- The deterioration of family bonds and bonds between persons in everyday life
- Lack of responsibility and consideration between generations
- Hopelessness and self-surrender amongst young and old persons
- Substance abuse and crime.

The lack of common experiences can mean less trust and fewer possibilities for community measures (Nordland, 2010). This, she points out, is the reason why we need community institutions such as recreational activity groups, scout movements and community organizations. These organizations can contribute to learning- and developmental work with its content and ways of operating.

In Norway, where families often only consist of the core family, many persons with disabilities often experience having a small social circle outside of family and work. Therefore it is important for many of them to attend recreational activities as a means of broadening their social relations. The Centre for Excellence and Outcome in Children and Young People's Services, C4EO writes that "Participation in positive activities is associated with positive outcomes in terms of person's health, experience of enjoyment and achievement" (C4EO, 2009). However, disabled young people report that bullying of fear or bullying spoils their experience of these activities or in some cases stops them from accessing, inclusive activities or using local leisure and recreational facilities (C4EO, 2009).

The idea of a democratic society, a society where everyone is of equal worth and participating members, has been the political focal point in recent times in Norway. Every person is a

quality in its own rights. The society, as far as it is possible, are to make sure that people, families and local communities are given the rights that are connected to the idea of “equal and participating persons” (Nordland, 2010). Yet, many persons with disabilities often feel misunderstood and have problems expressing their feeling of isolation which I think is perfectly captured in the poem An Autistic Child;

An Autistic Child

Here I am locked inside my own little world,

You think I don't listen to you but I hear every word.

Sometimes I get frustrated because you don't understand

It's not my fault it's the way I am!

I wish I could say what I want to say

But I'm autistic so that kinda gets in the way.

For those who don't know me

They probably think I'm out of control

If they could play my role!

I know I'm not on my own

There are lots of others who feel the same way

A constant battle; a losing game.

Two steps forward about a million back

Will I ever get the normal life that I lack?

Family and friends try their best

But they are exhausted and

In desperate need of a rest

Just for someone to find the key

To unlock the missing piece hidden deep within me

The line “I know I’m not on my own, there are lots of other who feel the same way” shows the frustration many persons with disabilities struggle with. This is why the facilitated recreational activity groups are so important for persons with disabilities. It gives them the opportunity to be part of a community where they can experience being accepted for who they are and that they are of importance to people other than their family, it might also be an arena where they can discover that other persons can relate to their situation. The need to create meaningful relationships with peers is just as important to persons with disabilities as they are to “normal” persons. The leaders in a facilitated recreational group play a major role in creating this type of environment through their work with the group as well as being positive role models.

1.1 Research Question

From the municipality’s web page, that will remain anonymous for the protection of my research subjects, one can read that they have many facilitated recreational activities, and that their recreational activity group for persons with disabilities takes place in the evening and is designed after wishes and needs for those participating. Every group therefore has a wide specter of activities. They also have groups for boys, girls and for both genders. The cultural sector in the municipality gives out a brochure every year with information about available activities within the community aimed specifically towards persons with disabilities; be it developmental disability, impaired disability, or mental disabilities.

Based on the information given, my research question will be;

In what way do the leaders of a facilitated recreational activity group create an environment that promotes social development?

In addition I have a few sub-questions that will help me when doing my observations

- Are the leaders using positive communication when communicating with the participants?
- Do the leaders make sure all participants are included in the activities? And how do they include everyone?
- Are the leaders giving the participants socially valid roles?

- Do the leaders show signs of active listening while talking to the participants?
- Are the activities adapted to the needs of the participants?

1.2 Outline of paper

In the next chapter I will define different central theories necessary for the discussion of my results. Following that there will be a methodology chapter where I outline the methodology, my process of preparing for observations, as well as the ethical considerations I faced doing this research. The structure of chapter four is divided into two parts. The first part will highlight my main results; the second part will look at my results in context to the theories described in the theoretical chapter. Following that is the discussion of my findings in relation to my research question and sub-questions. The last chapter will contain a short summary of my findings and ending notes.

2 Theoretical framework and existing knowledge

This chapter is mainly in two parts. Part one is the first sub-chapter as this is more of a literary review. It is evident through both the convention and the laws mentioned that there already is a focus on improving the life of persons with disabilities. The second part is the theoretical framework. When discussing my results, it is these theories I will use, in combination with my research question and sub-questions, to discuss the work the leaders are doing and whether or not this work is promoting social competence development.

2.1 UN Conventions on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Anti-Discrimination and Accessibility Act

The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities was signed in 2007 in Norway, and ratified in 2013. The convention fathoms the rights in the UN-conventions concerning economical, cultural and social rights and of civilian and political rights for persons with disabilities (United Nations, 2006).

Ratification means that the government of a country adopts a commitment to fulfill the convention. Norwegian laws are, at the moment, considered to be in accordance with the UN-Convention

2.1.1 Articles of importance to facilitated recreational activities

The preamble to the UN-Convention says that

“disability is an evolving concept and that disability results from the interaction between persons with impairments and attitudinal and environmental barriers that hinders their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others” (United Nations, 2006)

The articles 26 and 30 are of the most important to facilitated recreational activity groups.

Article 26 describes the right for persons with disabilities to participate in social life. Article 26 states that “States Parties shall take effective and appropriate measures, including through peer support, to enable persons with disabilities to attain and maintain maximum independence, full physical, mental, social and vocational ability, and full inclusion and participation in all aspects of life” (United Nations, 2006). The local municipalities as well as the state in general have an obligation to “organize, strengthen and extend comprehensive habilitation and rehabilitation services and programmes, particularly in the areas of health, employment, education and social services, in such a way that these services and programmes”:

- A. Begin at the earliest possible stage, and are based on the multidisciplinary assessment of individual needs and strengths;
- B. Support participation and inclusion in the community and all aspects of society, are voluntary, and are available to persons with disabilities as close as possible to their own communities, including in rural areas (United Nations, 2006).

In essence, Norway has agreed to make sure that all persons with disabilities living in Norway should have full access to all aspects of life. It is important that the state makes sure aspects of the persons recreational time is as fulfilling as possible, and that the person with disability has an opportunity to partake in recreational activities on an equal basis as other persons.

Article 30 of the convention is directed at the cultural aspect of the person with disability's life. They should be granted access as far as possible to culturally important activities, such as cultural performances and services. Accessibility to cultural sectors are important not only as a benefit to the person with disabilities, but also for the enrichment of society, as stated in section 2 of article 30. Section 2 encourages States Parties to “take appropriate measures to enable persons with disabilities to have the opportunity to develop and utilize their creative, artistic and intellectual potential, not only for their own benefit, but also for the enrichment of society” (United Nations, 2006).

Section 5 of article 30 say “With a view to enabling persons with disabilities to participate on an equal basis with others in recreational, leisure and sporting activities, States Parties shall take appropriate measures” (United Nations, 2006):

- a) To encourage and promote the participation, to the fullest extent possible, of persons with disabilities in mainstream sporting activities at all levels;
- b) To ensure that persons with disabilities have an opportunity to organize, develop and participate in disability-specific sporting and recreational activities and, to this end, encourage the provision, on an equal basis with others, of appropriate instruction, training and resources;
- c) To ensure that persons with disabilities have access to sporting, recreational and tourism venues;
- d) To ensure that children with disabilities have equal access with other children to participation in play, recreation and leisure and sporting activities, including those activities in the school system;
- e) To ensure that persons with disabilities have access to services from those involved in the organization of recreational, tourism, leisure and sporting activities (United Nations, 2006).

One of the biggest challenges for many persons with disabilities for full participation in cultural and recreational activities is access. Norway has agreed to make an effort to ensure that persons with disabilities have access to as many activities as possible. By having activities in buildings that are wheelchair accessible, has elevators, and doors that are wheelchair accessible one makes sure that person with disabilities have access physically to activities. Besides just making it physically possible for the persons with disabilities to attend any type of activities, one also needs persons that can work with, and adapt activities to the needs of the person with disabilities.

2.1.2 UN-Convention and Anti-Discrimination and Accessibility Act

The Anti-Discrimination and Accessibility Act took effect 1.1.2009 and puts a responsibility on the Government of Norway to take steps to enable people with disabilities to exercise their rights as citizens, as well as fulfill their obligations as citizens. The law was changed in accordance to the UN-Convention and the new law took effect 1.1.2014. The responsibility of the Government has not changed.

The Government bases its efforts in this field on the principles of social equality and universal design. People who live with functional impairments must be assured living

conditions and a quality of life on a par with the rest of the population. Everyone shall have equal rights and be able, as far as possible, to decide over his or her own life (Ministry for Children, Equality and Social Inclusion, n.d.).

§ 1 and 2 states the purpose of the law, which is to promote equality for persons with disabilities, and where the law is in effect. Equality is meant in the form of equal worth, opportunities, rights, accessibility and facilitation. The law is supposed to contribute in reducing the socially created barriers for persons with disabilities and prevent new ones to be created. The law is enforced on all aspects of society, except in family life and other private spheres (Barne-, likestillings-, og inkluderingsdepartementet, 2014).

The Norwegian Act and the UN-Convention is in accordance at this point. The UN-Convention stated that “discrimination against any person on the basis of disability is a violation of the inherent dignity and worth of the human person” (United Nations, 2006).

§16 state the right to individual facilitation of municipal services. Persons with disabilities have a right to an individually adapted facilitation of services in accordance with the Act of health and care services. The Act of Health and Care services state the responsibility of each municipality to offer health promoting and preventive services that, amongst other obligations, are socially, psychosocially and medicinal habilitation and rehabilitation. Through the health and care services, the municipalities seek to prevent illness, injury and social problems. They are responsible for the implementation of welfare and activity measures for children, the elderly and persons with disabilities (Barne-, likestillings-, og inkluderingsdepartementet, 2014; Helse- og omsorgsdepartementet, 2012). This is where facilitated recreational activity groups comes into the picture

2.2 Facilitated Recreational Activity group

The terms organized recreational activity groups and facilitated recreational activity groups might look the same to some, but there is one main thing that separates them. The term organized recreational activities is a term used on an activity group that meets four standards (Løvgren, 2009):

1. It is led by adults
2. It takes place at an agreed upon place, at a specifically given time

3. Is arranged by a volunteer organization or by the officials within a county
4. Is open for adolescents and adults

In addition, facilitated recreational activities have one supplementary standard, and that standard is basically that the groups are only open for persons with disabilities. Activities that operate within a community, with an agreed upon place and time, is ideal for persons in need of facilitation. Predictability and openness makes facilitated recreational activity groups more suitable for persons that need facilitation and routines in their life (Løvgren, 2009).

Children and adolescents with disabilities often participate in recreational activities with children who are “normal” while they are young, but as they get older they tend to move towards groups or other persons with disabilities. This might be caused by the fact that as children and adolescents gets older, their social gathering spots get more random, and that makes it harder for persons with disabilities that are in greater need of facilitation, to take part in the activities.

2.2.1 Groups as support and help for development

In a research conducted by Jorun Ramm in 2010, she found that 23 percent of the participants with disabilities had felt quite or very lonely in the last 14 days leading up to the research, compared to only 6 percent of the population of persons without disabilities. It is especially young persons under the age of 45 that experiences loneliness. In addition, persons with disabilities experience more psychological distress than the overall population.

Approximately 46 percent of persons with disabilities compared to only 12 percent in the population in general. This might be due to the fact that disabilities result in lower participation in many activities, especially social activities. Participation in social activities and social interaction is an important source for excess energy and pleasure (Ramm, 2010).

Groups have been created to help and support persons that have special needs. The intention and work with groups like these is to help the participants help themselves and others when they can share feelings and experiences (Gjertsen, 2010). The recreational activity groups can be seen as a social community. A social community is an environment where persons that know each other and means something to each other. It is crucial that the persons spend time together, takes initiatives together and gather common experiences. A functioning social community means that the members or participants

- Have common practical experiences that make it possible to understand each other's problems and start measures to improve everyday situations.
- Support each other when difficulties arise, for a single person or for the community as a whole.
- Tests different measures and arrangements that cater to the common goals the community has.

The potential for social contact, inclusion and the opportunity to experience mastering an activity should be a goal in itself. Facilitated recreational activities can be related to the development of quality of life for persons with disabilities. An arena for social development can have a positive implication on more than one aspect of a person with disabilities' life, as well as for persons without disabilities. The figure below shows how all aspects of a person's life are connected;

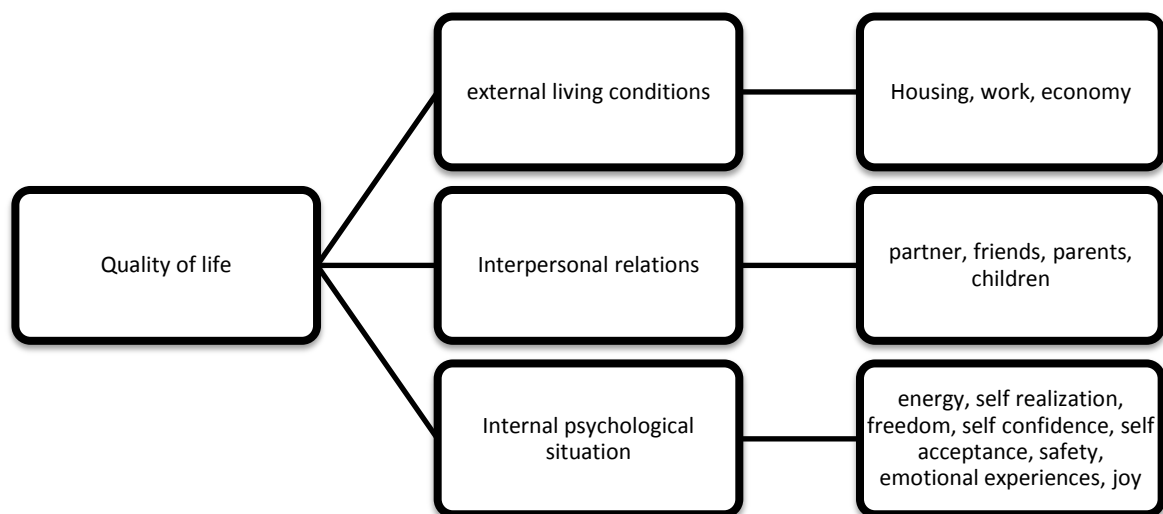


Figure 2.1: Representation of aspects in a person's life that results in quality of life

The goal of a facilitated recreational activity group will therefore be to

- Give each other support when needed
- Practice mutual control

- Identify hidden emotion and a feeling of strength
- Remedy the feeling of isolation or deviance through generalization
- Make successful self representation through collective strength (Gjertsen, 2010)

The creation of interpersonal relations can positively affect the internal psychological situation of a person. The opportunity to compare life experiences, values, attitudes and experiences and to give each other support and courage to try, experiment and take risks. Ideas, suggestions and solutions can be exchanged and the participants can develop meaningful social relations to others. Recreational activity groups can for some be the only environment where a disabled person can participate in an environment with peers outside of school and work. Organized recreational activities represent a positive context for work in the direction of integration and equal participation for all in activity and social environment (Løvlie, 2009; Gjertsen, 2010).

2.3 Disability

The reason why I have chosen to define disability despite the fact that I am not observing any of the participants in the facilitated recreational activity group is because disabilities can be a hindering factor in social development even within a group like the one I did my research in. there are many aspects of disabilities that the leaders have to take into consideration when planning and implementing activities and actions for promoting social development.

In Norway, developmental disability is the term used for different degrees of cognitive impairment. Norway, being a part of the World Health Organization also known as WHO, have agreed and committed itself to use the International Classification of Diseases (ICD-10). This is first and foremost in the medical field (Rognhaug and Gommæs, 2008). Numbers from WHO states that 2-2,5 percent of the world's population is disabled. In Norway they calculate a percentage of 1,5 or just about 60 000 persons are disabled (Tidemand-Andersen, 2008). The four degrees of developmental disability, according to the ICD-10 is:

- Mild degree of developmental disability. 75 to 90 percent of all persons with disability are in this category. The person understands and communicates, but might have problems with conceptual understanding. They have an IQ very close to what is

considered normal, and their senses are usually normally developed, and physical defects and additional disabilities are not prominent. Persons in this category have the ability for social adaption and work training.

- Moderate degree of developmental disability. 10 to 15 percent of disabled persons are in this category. The person can talk and learn to communicate, and have good use of self-help functions and social skills. Most children in this group is diagnosed at an early age and have one or more organic reason for their disability.
- Severe degree of developmental disability. Approximately 7 percent of disabled persons are in this category. They understand simple communication, but have limited ability to express themselves. They have the ability to reach a limited degree of self-help.
- Profound degree of developmental disability. Approximately 1 percent of disabled persons are in this category. Persons in this group have restricted communication skills, often through nonverbal sounds. Most need continuous supervision throughout their lives. Well being and development is experienced through learning through their environment and interaction (Rognhaug and Gomnæs, 2008; Tidemand-Andersen, 2008)

The American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (AAIDD) defines developmental disabilities as significant limitations both in intellectual functions as well as the ability to adapt in a way expressed in conceptual, social and practical function. As a difference from the ICD-10, the AAIDD wants to move away from the current medical definition where intelligence testing, medical explanations and expectations linked to learning is the basis for the diagnosis. They want to shift the focus away from the medical aspect and more towards a social aspect, where the focus is not on the disability as something innate in the person with disability, and rather place the focus on the person's surroundings. They wish to make a classification based on the need of support the person would need to be able to function in a natural setting such as at home or in social settings (Rognhaug and Gomnæs, 2008).

They have developed four levels of supportive needs:

1. Intermittent support. Help and support is given where needed. The person does not always require help.
2. Limited support. Help and support are characterized as consistent. The scope of, and the time required, might be limited but not intermittent
3. Extensive support. The need for help and support is extended to everyday activities, at least in some areas such as at home or at work. This is not time-limited.
4. Pervasive support. Help and support is characterized as constant and intensive in all areas of the person's life. The measures are often comprehensive and will depend on extensive use of assistants.

The support that the person is given, should preferably be in the form of resources and strategies that has as a goal to promote development, learning, interests and the experience of well being (Rognhaug and Gommæs, 2008). This opens up the possibility for a complete evaluation where the person with disability is evaluated in context to their surroundings and gives the possibility for a complete evaluation and planning of measures and facilitation relevant for the person (Rognhaug and Gommæs, 2008).

The group where I have observed the leaders consists only of persons with mild to moderate disabilities. And even though they are all within the same categories, they are all different, and all have different interests, abilities and intellectual level. This can be a challenge when creating an environment that benefits all its participants, and puts an extra challenge on the leaders.

2.4 Social Competence and Development of Social Competence

Terje Ogden focuses on children in his book *Social Competence and Problem Behavior in School* (2008), but it also possible to relate this to adults with disabilities. C4EO writes that

“Limited exposure to non-disabled children's play interferes with disabled children's social development, particularly in terms of their understanding of peer culture. This can make it difficult for them to integrate in inclusive settings” (C4EO, 2009)

The same can be said for adults with disabilities, if one takes play to mean a social interaction with other people. If a person with disabilities are not given the opportunity to interact with other people they will gradually lose their understanding of peer culture. Persons with disabilities are often struggling, not only with physical challenges, but also cognitive problems. All persons, no matter their age, gender or abilities, prefer to contact arenas where they have a feeling of accomplishment, and where they meet persons that accept them and meet them where they are. This could be at work, within their family or within a recreational activity group such as the one I observed.

2.4.1 Social Competence Defined

Social Competence is defined by Bø and Helle (2008) as having the knowledge, skills and motivation needed for a successful communication and adaption to other persons. It is also the capability to practice these skills in a natural, friction free way in situations where they are expected to be practiced, like for instance in facilitated recreational activity groups.

Ogden mentions three definitions of social competence, by the scholars Schneider, Garbarino and Weissberg and Greenberg.

B.H Schneider defines social competence as the ability to utilize developmentally adapted social behavior that promotes one's own interpersonal relations. The definition emphasizes the importance of a pro-social behavior and excludes negative behavior (Ogden, 2008).

Garbarino defines social competence as a set of skills, attitudes, emotions and motives needed to master the most important settings that individuals or persons within reason can be expected to meet in a social environment they are a part of, at the same time as their well being is maximized and future development is promoted. Garbarino states that persons try to reach a universal need, so the person's social competence is adapted to the ecological niche it is in, and is not a general ability in itself. A person with disabilities might act different in contact with other persons with disabilities than they would with persons without disabilities (Ogden, 2008).

Weissberg and Greenberg define it as a person's capacity to adapt and integrate thoughts, feelings and behavior to succeed in social tasks and develop in a positive way. This theory points to the importance that persons' can regulate their thoughts, feelings and behavior as well as analyze and understand social situations, solve problems, set goals for themselves,

analyze consequences of their choices and predict both positive and negative outcomes of those choices (Ogden, 2008).

Ogden summarizes all these definitions as a relatively stable set of signs in the way of knowledge, skills and attitudes that makes it possible to establish and maintain social relations. It leads to realistic understanding of one's personal competence, is a prerequisite for mastering social interaction and to reach social accept or establish close and personal friendships (Ogden, 2008). Social competence is important to establish interpersonal contact, develop friendships and creating social networks. It also affect how person's see themselves, as for example in feeling competent or feel like they are being accepted and respected.

2.4.2 Developing Social Competence

There are certain developmental milestones that children and adolescents are expected to reach while growing up. In pre-school age they are expected to create and develop bonds and meaningful relationships with their caretakers, develop language skills, learn to control their behavior and to develop motor skills. In school age they are expected to learn to read, write and do arithmetic's, follow the rules of the school, and create meaningful relationships with their peers and to deal with conflict in an age appropriate manner. In adolescent age it's more about preparing for higher education or work life. Adapting to change in their life, engage in different recreational activities, develop close friendships with people of both genders as well as develop their own identity (Ogden, 2008; Rygvold & Ogden, 2008). But how will this affect person with disabilities? Social competence requires that a person can read and understand non-verbal and social signals. That they have control of their motor skills, and understandable linguistic skills making them capable to make contact with and answer others. It also requires motivation. Persons with significant motor skill difficulties and linguistic difficulties have trouble gaining the communication skills that social competence is based on. This is particularly visible amongst persons with disabilities (Ogden, 2008). But it is not only linguistic skills or motor skills that can hinder social interaction. Persons with Autism and Asperger Syndrome for example, often struggle with understanding social cues, have trouble reading body language and struggle with empathy. They can often be seen as rude or mean. The fact that they also often have narrow interests as well as trouble outside their own routines can result in them not being desirable play mates at a young age, or possible friends as they get older. It is not that they do not want to build friendships; it is the fact that they lack

the skills on how to do it. Social relations that do not work, can soon put a stop to the communication, or lead to conflicts. In a worst case scenario it can lead to a situation where interest for future contact diminishes. To gain positive results, social skills have to be practiced in a social relation where the persons compliments each other and recognizes each other's roles and contribution. These roles can be friendship between peers, or relation between members and leaders of a recreational activity group. In these types of relations, both are dependent on each other's contribution to succeed in one's role and to succeed reaching one's social role.

Gersham and Elliot, mentioned in Ogden (2008) have divided social skills needed for development of social competence into seven point

1. Social skills are learned through observation, practice and feedback
2. It consists of specific verbal and non-verbal behavior
3. Take initiative and respond in ways adapted to the situation and give wanted results
4. Increases possibility for social confirmation
5. Interactive by nature, adapted to situation and gives wanted reactions
6. The practice is influenced by characteristics in the environment
7. Faults and overstatement can be used as subjects for interventions.

A person must be given a valued role within a social setting and given the opportunity to learn the necessary skills to function adequately within a group. It's all about adapting social skills to the person's ability and is functional in the group the person is a member of. It is also important to give the person the possibility to contribute to the groups' productivity and mood in a positive way and to receive positive feedback on this. Competence has been shown to improve a person's ability to master certain developmental skills, result in a better and healthier way of life and better psychological aspects.

In a nurturing environment people develop, while in a hostile environment persons adapt to survive.

2.5 Social Role Valorization (SRV)

The Social Role Valorization (from here on referred to as the SRV) originates from the Scandinavian tradition of normalization. The theory is a scientific theory developed by Wolf

Wolfensberger at the Training Institute for Human Service Planning, Leadership and Change Agency at the University of Syracuse. In the 1980's he moved away from the idea of "normalization" in favor of the SRV. Wolfensberger states that people's well being is defined by what kind of social role they are given within a society. It is mainly through people's social roles that they are defined and in turn define themselves (Askheim, 2008).

Wolfensberger's intention has been to develop what he characterizes as "a systematic theory that can be used as a universal guiding principle in the design and conduct of human services" (Wolfensberger in Askheim, 2008:29). He then goes on to state that the system will be powerful when applied to services that are available for persons whom are devalued in the larger society. The SRV is a theory based on empirical data and is therefore a strictly scientific theory. The human process of perception is evaluating by nature and even if a person act unconsciously, our perceptions of others are never neutral or free of value.

Persons, or groups of persons labeled as "deviant" are given social roles of low importance or value, and as a result of that they are often treated in a way that reflects their low status. The goal for SRV is therefore to prevent, or change the process of devaluation of persons with disabilities, and to help persons who are, or is in danger of becoming devalued, to reach a culturally valid role. The society as a system puts emphasis on competition and ranking of persons. It imprints on some persons that they do not measure up; and this group is in danger of losing their confidence, willpower and determination and develops into spectators in society (Nordland, 2010; Askheim, 2008).

There are ten core themes for working with SRV according to Wolfensberger. Those ten points are:

1. The importance of the unconscious mind
2. The dynamics and significance of language imagery
3. Significance of established perceptions and expectations
4. Significance of role expectations and "role circularity"
5. Development of personal competence
6. Significance of relevance, potency and model coherency in objectives and services
7. Significance of identification between valued and devalued persons
8. Significance of imitation and model-learning
9. Significance of social integration and valued social participation

10. Principle of “positive compensation” for devalued status

When comparing to what can be done within the realm of a facilitated recreational activity group, the focus will mainly be on points four (4) and five (5) as it will be too complicated for the leaders of such groups to be able to affect every level of society. What other people think and feel is out of their control, but working with the persons within the group is, and should be, possible and a priority (Askheim, 2008).

Significance of role expectations and role circulation is described by Kristjane Kristiansen as a self-fulfilling prophecy. She states that persons whom are in risk of being devalued will adapt or in some way live up to the expectations given them by society. This in turn can lead to the person seeing themselves as devalued and their actions and the way the society treats them can help confirm their understanding of themselves. Kristiansen illustrates this circle with a circular model that shows how this all are connected to each other (Askheim, 2008). The following model is a simplification of her original model;

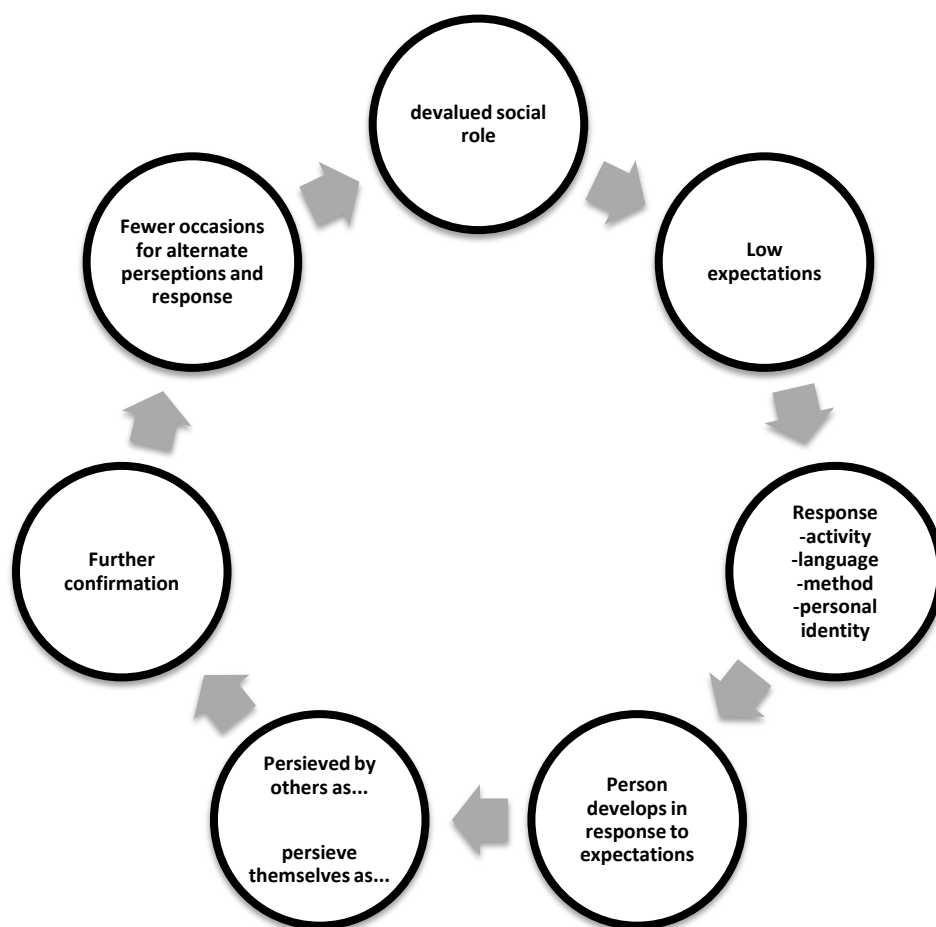


Figure 2.2: Simplified version of Kristiansen's model on reinforcement of negative social roles through role circularity (Askheim, 2008)

One of the main goals for SRV-work will as a contrast to this model, be to create positive roles and role expectations. Persons who are predisposed to be devalued must be given the opportunity to experience a feeling of accomplishment, worth and that they are a positive addition to a society. The people working with such persons therefore have an obligation to treat the person with respect and show that the person is worthy.

The underlying premise for all SRV-work is that everyone, no matter age, physical or mental ability or gender, has the potential to learn and develop and grow. The main challenge is to give devalued persons or groups an opportunity to do just that. They need an opportunity to develop new competence, and especially competence that is valued by the society. It is also important to construct groups in ways that give positive model-learning and peer-to-peer learning. Activities must be adapted to each person's level of competence and potential for development (Askheim, 2008).

What is a valid social role? That depends completely on the situation, and is defined differently by the social situation. A person with Cerebral Palsy might have a low social value on a football team, but might be a highly valued member within a group consisting solely of people with disabilities (Askheim, 2008).

2.6 Positive Communication and active listening

Positive communication is crucial in interpersonal relations. The understanding that all persons have a basic right to be an independent and self-dependent participant in the community, and experience a feeling of equality is important for positive communication (Nordland, 2009; Gjertsen 2010).

Positive communication entails the ability to see the building blocks for future development, and to be able to convey these observed building blocks as an expression of recognition and trust, and to use a form of communication that gives strength and encouragement to the participants. When one has learned to notice the positive on what is happening around oneself and being able to express it, one strengthens one's own and others ability for positive interaction (Nordland 2009).

Positive communication is an important tool for those interested and engaged in social development and change; people such as group leaders of facilitated recreational activity groups. It is important that the leaders acknowledges and stimulates those resources that are available within a group. Each person within the group is a unique person as well as a member of the group. If the group is to function as a tool for development and learning, there has to be personal relation and cooperation amongst its participants. This demands an appropriate composition of a group, motivation and a group leader that understands the group members' needs. The leader must set boundaries and structures, but be careful not to steer the group in a way that makes it hard for the members to take advantage of the things the others have to offer (Nordland, 2009; Gjertsen, 2010).

Leaders have an important role when it comes to creating a developing process within a group. These points can, or should, involve planning and initiating, as well as suggesting, informing, clarifying, interpreting, supporting and adapting activities that are beneficial for the group and their development. In addition it is important that the leader is a role model for the members. To be a role model for problem solving and by underlining certain values and attitudes that is positive for the group's development gives the group leader a central function as a process creator within the group. Their goal is to make the group a resource to the individual person. It is important that the leader acknowledges and stimulates those resources that are available within a group (Gjertsen, 2010).

2.6.1 Active Listening as a tool in positive communication

Active listening is a term used when the listener in a communication situation is showing through verbal and nonverbal communication that they are participating in the communication. Active communication is often used in counseling and training. (Bø and Helle, 2008; Nordland, 2010)

One can say that active listening consists of three stages that are all connected to each other, as shown in the following model;

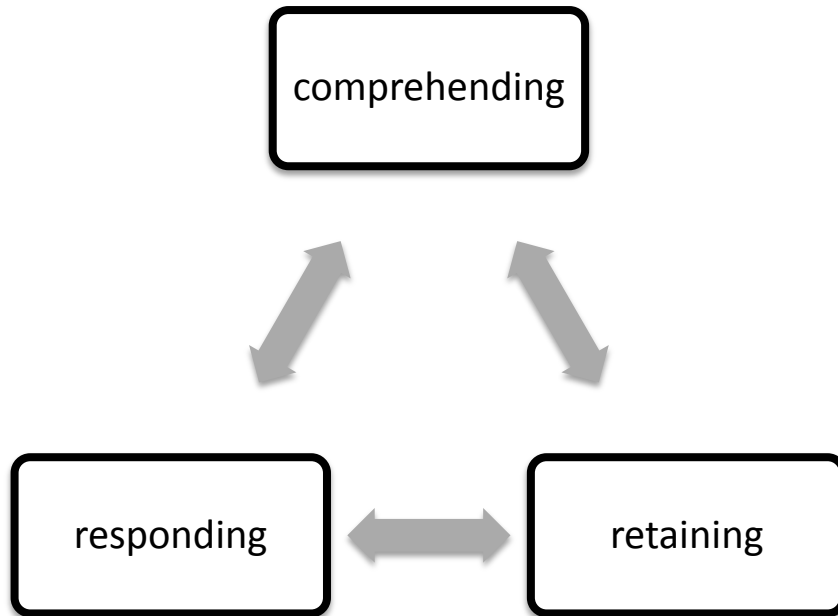


Figure 2.3: active listening.

John Grohol has created 13 steps to becoming a better listener, and a good active listener. The points are;

1. **Restating:** To show you are listening, repeat every so often what you think the person said by paraphrasing what you heard in your own words.
2. **Summarizing:** Bring together the facts and pieces of the problem to check understanding.
3. **Minimal encouragers:** Use brief, positive prompts to keep the conversation going and show you are listening
4. **Reflecting:** Instead of just repeating, reflect the speaker's words in terms of feelings
5. **Giving feedback:** Let the person know what your initial thoughts are on the situation. Share pertinent information, observations, insights, and experiences. Then listen carefully to confirm.
6. **Emotion labeling:** Putting feelings into words will often help a person to see things more objectively.
7. **Probing:** Ask questions to draw the person out and get deeper and more meaningful information
8. **Validation:** Acknowledge the individual's problems, issues, and feelings. Listen openly and with empathy, and respond in an interested way

9. **Effective pause:** Deliberately pause at key points for emphasis. This will tell the person you are saying something that is very important to them.
10. **Silence:** Allow for comfortable silences to slow down the exchange. Give a person time to think as well as talk. Silence can also be very helpful in diffusing an unproductive interaction.
11. **“I” messages:** By using “I” in your statements, you focus on the problem not the person.
12. **Redirecting:** If someone is showing signs of being overly aggressive, agitated, or angry, this is the time to shift the discussion to another topic.
13. **Consequences:** Part of the feedback may involve talking about the possible consequences of inaction. Take your cues from what the person is saying (Grohol, 2007)

Active listening works if the listener concentrates on clarifying feelings and bringing them out for the speaker to see, making it possible for them to be aware of what happened and think about the situation in a new way, and hopefully being able to come up with a solution on their own.

2.7 Applying the ICDP

The ICDP, or the International Child Development Program was developed in Norway and is included in the parental guidance program, and is available in all municipalities in Norway (Rye, 2001). Rye writes that the “ICDP’s program is based on the idea that when problems arise in the relationship between caregiver and child, problems that appear to be long-term and ingrained, intervention can start with focusing on the caregiver” (Rye, 2001:84). It is in essence that; through guidance and reflection over one owns interactions skills, one can turn negative communication into positive communication

2.7.1 Eight guiding principles of the ICDP

The ICDP is based on eight guiding principles for positive interaction. The ICDP principles are not limited to only young children, but can be relevant in interaction all the way up to adulthood, and the communication-oriented principles are important in interpersonal interactions throughout a person’s life (Rye, 2001). It is also possible to apply these eight points for positive interaction between leaders and participants in a facilitated recreational

activity group. The ICDP encourages caregivers to explore the way they interact, and how they can further develop this aspect. The following guiding principles are the basic points of the ICDP, but it has been adapted to the interaction between teacher and pupil, or leader and participant within a facilitated recreational activity groups (Rye, 2001).

1. Demonstrate positive feelings. By demonstrating positive feelings, the leaders show that they are interested in the participant as a person. It is important that the leaders demonstrate that they care for the participant as well as help the participants to enjoy themselves within the group. All persons, no matter age or abilities are to some degree able to perceiving emotional expressions. It is important for the participants security that the leaders are emotionally accessible and that the leaders express pleasure and enthusiasm.
2. Adapt to the participant. Adapting the way the leaders work with, and relate to the participants in a way that one addresses and acknowledges the participants' initiative and individuality. In interaction, it is important that one is aware of the recipient's wishes and actions, their state of being, feelings and body language. It is especially important that the leaders follow the cues of the participants and that they direct their focus to the interest of the participants.
3. Talk to the participant. The leaders should invite the participants to take part in dialogs. Follow the participants cues is also important in this point, as well as talking about things that interest them.
4. Give praise and acknowledgement to each participant when they make an effort to cooperate, follow instructions and do the best they can. The participants, even though they are all adults, still need the leaders' reactions and guidance as a frame of reference for their own behavior. Expressions of acceptance, recognition or praise provide a foundation that is important for development of self-confidence and social adjustment. Genuine expressions of acceptance are connected to positive emotional relationships. It is also important for the leaders to receive the same things from the participants. Without a positive, mutual experience of one another, communication and positive interaction can stagnate.

5. Help the participant focus their attention. To be able to do this, the leaders have to make sure they have the participants' full attention when they work with them, or give any form of instructions. Shared experiences and attention is a prerequisite for good communication. That the participants' attention is directed towards certain experiences can imply that the participant is more prepared and receptive to what the leader wants to communicate.
6. Give meaning to the participant's experiences. The leaders need to make their instructions meaningful for the participants, as well as show their own enthusiasm and personal involvement. In this way, the leaders have the opportunity to show the participants that some things are more important than other, like values and cultural traditions.
7. Elaborate and explain. The leaders should relate the content of what they are doing to other aspects of the participants' life. This can result in giving the participants insight, help form associations and inspire curiosity and motivation for participation and learning.
8. Help the participant achieve self-discipline. The leaders have a responsibility to help the participants adapt to the environment and activities within the group. This can be done by clearly planning activities, and having personal and predictable ways of reacting. By letting the participants partake in the planning of activities and providing them with understandable explanations for when something is not possible, the leaders help the participants to become more motivated to cooperate. Predictability is better than reprimands. (Rye, 2001)

One of the most important aspects for any person to thrive in a social situation like a facilitated recreational activity group is that they feel secure and enjoy being a part of the group. This is dependent on positive leader-participant interaction as well as positive participant-participant relations. It might therefore be important to use and discover ways to implement the principles of the ICDP program to promote development of a positive activity group environment (Rye, 2001).

3 Methodology

This research is a qualitative study, built on observations conducted in a facilitated recreational activity group for adults with developmental disabilities. The observations were conducted over a period of 8 weeks in the winter of 2013/14.

By choosing a Qualitative Research design, I can, as a researcher, go more in depth within a small group; get a more accurate view of how the leaders work functions within this group to create an environment for social development, and make, hopefully, a more accurate conclusion for my research. However, with a Qualitative Research design I will not be able to make a conclusion that will attain to all facilitated recreational activity groups, but will only reflect the situation within the group I based my research on.

3.1 Observation as a chosen method

Bø and Helle define an observer as a person that sits outside a group and performs a systematic observation of how one or more people behave (2008). It is the study of a phenomenon.

Observations, compared to other methods of data collection, give the researcher the advantage of directly observing the behavior and the social and physical environment of the individual being studied. Gall, Gall and Borg (2007) states that “if used properly, these observational methods avoid the potential inaccuracy and bias of data generated by research participants” (p.263).

I chose observation as the method preferable over any other method because it will give me the opportunity to formulate my own version of what is occurring within the recreational group, in connection to my research question. As Gall, Gall and Borg writes; “The inclusion of selected observations in a researcher’s report provides a more complete description of phenomena than would be possible by just referring to interview statements or documents” (2007:276). After deciding on observation as a method, the next step, when granted access to research participants, was to decide what type of observations would most likely give me the opportunity to observe behavior that would answer my research questions.

3.1.1 Types of observation

Gall, Gall and Borg (2007) mentions four different methods for observation, duration, frequency-count, interval and continuous.

1. Duration. The observer measures the elapsed time during which a target behavior occurs.
2. Frequency count. The observer records how often a target behavior occurs. A tally sheet is normally used for this type of observation. This form of observation is most useful when recording behavior of short duration or where duration is not important
3. Interval. Observing the behavior of an individual at certain intervals. Once sampling is done, the data must be summarized and reported to provide a meaningful description of what happened.
4. Continuous. This form of recording consists of recording all the behavior of the target individual or individuals. It is typically a protocol analysis, which means interpreting and generating of everything that the individual does in a chronological order.

In this research, I have used three of the four methods, in different situations. I did observations frequently throughout the four hours the group was gathered.

During activities, depending on the situation, I would change between duration observation and continuous observation. During one observation for instance, I observed the body language of one leader. For every time the leader changed the way she was sitting, I would record the time. In another situation, the group was given information about a new person joining their group. The group leaders gathered all the participants and gave information. In this instance continuous observation worked better as I could focus on the information they were giving the participants and what they focused on. I only focused on the leaders, not the participants, so it was easy to record everything they were saying and doing.

When the group was sitting down to eat dinner together, I performed a frequency-count observation, as a lot was going on at one time and it would be hard to do for example continuous observation. I looked for the same things during every observation in this situation. I noticed that it was actually easier to do a frequency-count form of observation as the leaders did not seem to notice this as well as they noticed the other forms of observation I did. Maybe this is because it is not as obvious that I am actually taking notes on the situation. On top of that I had already prepared several different observation sheets

An example of a frequency table used in my research:

Time: 30 min			
Number of people attending: 12			
Number of persons observed: 1			
Setting: Collective dinner			
Action	Frequency	Total	Description
Ask question	IIIIIIIIII	13	
Answers question	III	3	
Initiates conversation with participant	IIIIII	7	Starts conversation between two or more participants, then pulls away
Take part in conversation started by participant	IIIIII	6	The participants starts telling something, leader responds accordingly
Corrects unwanted behavior	I	1	The leader corrects one participant in a quiet way, not drawing attention to the participant
Gives praise for good social behavior	II	2	
Instructs/ describes situations	IIIIIIIIII	13	

Figure 3.1: example of an observation tally sheet used during my observations.

3.1.2 Purpose of observation

The purpose of my observations was to discover if the leaders of a facilitated recreational activity group were creating an environment that would nurture social development for the participants. This phenomenon would be next to impossible to discover through interviews or through a survey without having a lot of issues concerning leading questions or personal understanding of the situation from the observation object.

The goal with my observation was to;

- Study my subjects in a natural setting
- The data gathered will consist of detailed information about a particular subject or situation

- Fill out and provide a deeper and richer understanding than would be possible through for example a surveys, as well as not demanding any prior knowledge or understanding on the part of the research subject
- Observe communication methods used by the leaders
- Observe how the leaders of a recreational group work towards creating a good social environment

3.2 Preparing for Observation

In order to be able to proceed with my research, I first had to get approval from the NSD. The Norsk Samfunnsvitenskapelig Database, the Norwegian Social Science Data Service, is to secure data dissemination and services to the research sector. NSD is a competence center that gives guidance to scientists and students in relations to gathering and analyzing data, as well as methodology, privacy and research ethics (NSD, n.d.). In other words, to be able to do any kind of research within the social sciences in Norway, you have to get it approved by the NSD. When my research proposal was approved, I could start my research.

In order to prepare for my observations I did trial observations at the place where I work. I did a series of trial observations, where I also chose what to focus on in my upcoming observations. Later I performed a few test observations within the group I wanted to observe. These test-observations proved important to me as I got an idea of how to best conduct my observations. It also gave my observation objects the opportunity to get used to having me there, and reduce the risk of getting false data as they did not know for certain when I would actually conduct my data collection, making them act more natural around the group participants. It also gave me an idea of how the dynamic of the group was, as well as pointing me in the direction of who I wanted to observe.

3.2.1 Gaining Entry

To gain entry into a group proved a lot harder than I first thought. I contacted several leaders of different facilitated recreational activity groups, but very few answered me. Negotiating access, data collection and analysis are not separate phases in a research process and in private arenas, such as a recreational activity group, there can be gatekeepers that makes it problematic to gain access (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). I encountered a lot of

gatekeepers that would not grant me access because of my choice of method. Observation makes it impossible for the researcher not to be in direct contact with the subject, and that was my biggest challenge.

Gall, Gall and Borg (2007) uses the term Site Relation in Educational Research when talking about gaining access to a field. They state that

“You should have a specific plan to establish and maintain positive human relations with the individuals who participates in your research study. Often these individuals are contracted through a particular site. Thus, you should also need to build a positive relationship with the administrators and other members of the site from which you will select your research participants” (Gall, Gall and Borg, 2007:87)

They go on to suggest considering ones workplace as a possible place to conduct your research. Instead of using my own workplace however, I contacted a person I know within the area I wanted to study and she contacted her superior whom in turn invited me to come and tell her about my research. The person I talked to was very enthusiastic about my research and granted me access to the facilitated recreational activity groups she is in charge of.

3.2.2 Population and Sample

Bø and Helle define population as the amount of possible cases that a selection of units is chosen from. When conducting research, it is the population that one wants to say something about, but only know a limited, randomly chosen material. In my research, the population represents all the leaders of facilitated recreational activity groups within one specific municipality in Norway (Bø and Helle, 2008). The group I chose was mainly chosen because of the variety of disabilities amongst the members. The disabilities range from mental disabilities, such as Asperger syndrome, to physical disabilities such as Cerebral Palsy. The variation of disabilities makes for a diverse group with many challenges for the leader in creating a social environment for the members. The diversity in itself is a hard tool to work with.

Sampling is a representatively chosen selection of a bigger unit, such as a group of persons or a chosen limited group. First I limited down the number of groups from to one group, I then had to choose two leaders within that group. The two leaders I chose, was chosen because of their different backgrounds. Leader 1 has an education in the field and will therefore have a very theoretical background and may also have a theoretical approach to her work. Leader 2

on the other hand has no educational background within the field, but has personal experience with raising a child with disabilities. This might affect how the two leaders work and communicate with the participants in the group.

I am aware that my population and my sampling were rather limited in this research, but as I am not comparing different ways of working with the participants of a group, I chose to only focus on this one particular group, this gives me the opportunity to go in depth and really study my phenomenon. As the very definition of qualitative research is in-depth analysis of a phenomenon, I still value the limited population and sampling given to me.

3.2.3 Defining Observer Role

As an observer, there are different roles one can chose to inhabit.

The complete observer means that the researcher maintains a posture of independence from the setting being studied. The complete participant studies a setting, in which she is already a member or assumes genuine membership during the course of the research. The observer-participant role means that the researcher acts primarily as an observer entering the setting only to gather data and interacting only casually and indirectly with the individuals or groups while engaged in observations. The participant-observer role; the researcher observes and interacts closely enough with individuals to establish a meaningful identity within their group; however, the researcher does not engage in activities that are at the core of the group's identity (Gall, Gall and Borg, 2007).

When I started my observations, I had made up my mind that I would conduct my observations as a complete observer. I felt that it would be my best choice to be able to observe the phenomenon I was looking for. However, it became more natural for me to participate within the group I was observing, and my role slowly changed from a complete observer to a participant-observer. I created an identity within the group, but at the same time, I did not participate in activities that were the core of the group's identity. When the group sat down to eat together, or was cooking that dinner, I stepped back and did not participate in the activity as neither a leader nor a participant. During my data-collection phase I remained an observer. However, observers of a qualitative study do not seek to be neutral or objective, and often include their own feelings into interpreting their observations (Gall, Gall and Borg, 2007)

3.2.4 Determining the Focus of Observation

Gall, Gall and Borg writes that the focus of a qualitative researcher's observation is most likely to shift during the course of the study. It is likely to happen in different stages, the descriptive stage, the focused stage and the selective stage. The descriptive stage is when the observer is unfocused and general in scope that provides a base that the researcher can branch out from. The focused state takes place when the researcher has found features of the phenomena under study that are of great interest and direct the attention to collecting more information about this features. Lastly there is the selective state. This is when the researcher has defined the research question and the focus shifts to deepening their understanding of the specific elements of empirical or theoretical importance (Gall, Gall and Borg, 2007).

When preparing my research proposal I had already decided to focus on the leaders in a facilitated recreational group, however I had not yet defined my research questions, and had a lot of other minor questions I wanted to explore.

The question of research focus involves the decision of what to observe at any given time. Often the setting I was in controlled this aspect of my research. In settings where it did not feel natural to do observations, I would refrain from doing any observations. This could be situations where the group was discussing private things, which would not be suitable for my research. In settings where it felt natural to do observations I would do at least one observation.

Narrowing and deepening the focus of observation can, according to Gall, Gall and Borg "foster the emergence of qualitative interpretations, which constitute the primary findings of the study" (2007:280). In my study, I started out observing a broad set of points I wanted information about, but as I built up a base for my observation I shifted my focus from generalized to more specific points like for instance the body language of the leaders when communicating with the participants.

3.3 Validity and Reliability

There has been a lot of discussion around the terms validity and reliability in qualitative research. It is difficult to measure validity and reliability in comparison to quantitative research. To be able to see why, one first has to define the terms.

3.4 Validity

Validity is defined by Gall, Gall and Borg (2007:657) as;

In testing, the appropriateness, meaningfulness and usefulness of specific interference made from test scores. In qualitative research, the extent to which the research uses methods and procedures that ensures a high degree of research quality and rigor.

Validity depends on the relationship of the conclusion to reality and there are really no method that is able to measure or completely assure that the researcher is able to capture this. Validity is relative and has to be assessed in relation to the purpose and circumstances of the research (Maxwell, 2005). In difference from quantitative research where the researcher has the possibility to do control groups, statistical control of extraneous variables, randomized sampling or test of statistical significance, qualitative research rarely have the benefit of previously planned comparisons, sampling strategies or statistical manipulations. The main emphasis of qualitative research will be how the researcher will rule out specific plausible alternatives and treats to the interpretations and explanations (Maxwell, 2005).

3.4.1 Two specific validity threats in qualitative research

The two main validity threats to my research are researcher bias and reactivity.

The main threat to qualitative conclusions is the selection of data during the research that fits the researcher's existing theories or preconception, and the selection of data that "stands out" to the researcher. It is impossible to remove these issues, but one can avoid negative consequences by understanding how the researcher's values and expectations, influence and conduct can affect the conclusion of the study (Maxwell, 2005).

Reactivity, or the influence the researcher has on the setting or individuals studied, is a second issue that is raised about qualitative research. Eliminating the actual influences of the researcher is impossible, but if one understands the influence one has, it is possible to use it productively. An observer is generally much less of an influence on participants behavior than the setting itself (Maxwell, 2005).

To avoid affecting reactivity, I first of all spent a lot of time in the group. This was to get the leaders used to having me around and observing them. By the leaders getting used to having me around, it would not feel unnatural when I was sitting there watching them and taking notes. In addition, when doing the observations I placed myself in such a way that I had a perfect view of the leaders without them seeing me. In that way, I avoided that they were too preoccupied with me observing them, hoping that they would act naturally in the setting they were in. I did not stage any situations either, but did all my research in settings that was natural at felt natural for me to do observations in.

When it came to checking my validity, one question I kept asking myself was; do my results actually answer my research question and sub-questions?

3.5 Reliability

Gall, Gall and Borg defines reliability as;

In case study research, the extent to which other researchers would arrive at similar results if they studied the same case using exactly the same procedures as the first researcher. In classical test theory, the amount of measurement error in the scores yielding by the test (2007:651).

Gall, Gall and Borg points out that it is hard to establish reliability. Within observations reliability is hard to measure as the data are often of limited or little use to other researchers because most such measures are designed to study a very specific attitude of behavior pattern and are rarely used more than once (Gall, Gall and Borg, 2007)

Lincoln and Guba state that there can be no validity without reliability; therefore a demonstration of validity is enough to establish reliability in any qualitative study (Golafshani, 2003). There is one question of importance when doing research; how to test or maximize the validity and as a result, the reliability of a qualitative study?

Some points for securing reliability that I have used was rigor, participants willing to participate, and peer scrutiny. With rigor I mean that I have used the same type of observation, with the same points of interest, in the same setting every time I was with the facilitated recreational group. I could then compare the results I got from time to time and get a deeper understanding of how the leaders work. This assured me a form of generalization. The observation sheet was prepared in advance so that when I started my observations, I had a clear idea of what I was looking for.

Another way of securing trustworthiness in a research is participants that are willing and enthusiastic about being part of the research. Each one of my observation objects had the opportunity to refuse to participate. By letting them agree to be a part of the research, I assured that the participants really wanted to be a part, and therefore would not feed me false data in the sense that they would not act differently than they would in a normal situation when I was observing them.

I also used peer scrutiny as a way to help me get a new or fresh perspective on my research. Using peer scrutiny may allow the researcher to challenge their own assumptions they have made. Being too close to one's own project inhibits the researcher from seeing it with detachment.

3.6 Ethical Consideration

Ethics is, according to Gall, Gall and Borg (2007), a branch of philosophy mainly concerned with how people act towards each other. It pronounces judgment of value about actions and develops rules to guide ethical choices. When doing research with human subjects there are many ethical issues to consider.

3.6.1 The Belmont Report

When doing research with human subjects there are many ethical issues to consider. The Belmont Report (1979) states that there are three fundamental ethical principles that need to be considered while performing the research.

The three fundamental ethical principles for using any human subjects for research are:

1. Respect for persons: protecting the autonomy of all people and treating them with courtesy and respect and allowing for informed consent. Researchers must be truthful and conduct no deception;

Gall, Gall and Borg defines informed consent as

The ethical and legal requirement that a researcher tell all potential research participant about the study's procedures, the information that they will be asked to disclose to the researcher, and the intended uses of that information (Gall, Gall and Borg, 2007:642)

When it comes to Respect for Persons, I handed out a consent form to the leaders, where they could agree to be a part of the project. In the letter, I gave a short introduction to who I am, what university and master thesis program I was a part of, as well as a short summary about my research. It also had an explanation of how I wanted to perform the research, and the method I wanted to use¹. In addition to the letter of consent, I made an oral agreement with the leaders that they could at any point withdraw their agreement to participate. I assured them that if they chose to withdraw their agreement; all the data gathered about them would be removed. This was to give them full autonomy for participating. I also made sure that the participants in the facilitated recreational group knew why I was in their group and that I was not there to observe them, but the leaders.

2. Beneficence: The philosophy of "Do no harm" while maximizing benefits for the research project and minimizing risks to the research subjects;

Hammersley and Atkinson (2004) write that even though ethnographic research seldom contains harmful consequences, it can still have big consequences for the persons involved in the research. It requires careful consideration of what effects it can have on the research participants. The potential harm needs to be considered before doing any form of research. One way of avoiding this is to make it impossible to trace information back to the research participants. By keeping the research subject completely anonymous, I will make it impossible for the reader of my thesis to in any way identify the subject. I will not mention municipality, activity group or participants with names. All information gathered will be deleted after the research is completed, and the letters of consent with the participant's signature will also be destroyed.

¹ See appendix 1 for information letter given to the leaders.

3. Justice: ensuring reasonable, non-exploitative, and well-considered procedures are administered fairly and equally

Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) state that “it has been claimed that research involves exploitation of those that are being studied; they give away information that is used by the researcher, and receive nothing or little to show for it” (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007: 303). It has also been claimed that researchers often study persons that are in a weaker position than themselves. It is hard to consider what exploitation is, but it contains a comparison of what is given and what is taken or what each side of the research contributes with. There are some suggested countermeasures that the researcher should consider as retribution; it can be in the form of services or money, or that the participant’s role should be strengthened in the process. It is also suggested that the research should be directed at the ones in charge rather than on the ones not in charge. By focusing on the leaders of the facilitated recreational group, I have done that. In addition, I have offered the participants the opportunity to read my research paper both before and after it has been submitted. I have also offered my help as a special needs educator if that is desired by the leaders as a form of retribution for letting me use them as research subjects.

Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) write that researchers within the field of social sciences can and should act ethically superior in relation to other researchers, and should have more ethical sensitivity and responsibility. They go on to say even though ethical values are important; they cannot be solved with a set of absolute rules.

4 Results

During my observations, I observed the work of the leaders in different situations. The one common activity for every group meeting was making food and eating dinner together. This situation was very intimate for both participants and leaders, and has been the focus of most of my observations. This is mostly due to the fact that it is a consistent activity every week, and only half the group participates in this activity, giving me the opportunity to study my observation objects closer than I could with the whole group present. I have also conducted observations in the group when everyone is present as well.

4.1 Findings from observations

During the research conducted, I repeated most of my observations at the same time every time, making a list of points I was especially looking for, as shown in the methodology chapter. This ensured me that the social setting would almost always be the same, and would hopefully give consistency in my observations. It is hard however to get consistency when observing human subjects, as people's moods changes and so their behavior changes with it. Therefore I did the same observations in the same situations so that on days when they differed considerably from other days, I could find explanations for that. The results did not change much from time to time however, and gave me more or less the same results every time. I also conducted a set of duration observations and some continuous observations. In this chapter I will not add my whole continuous observation, but I have made shorter summaries.

4.1.1 Results from frequency count

When conducting the frequency count observations I did 15 minute observations of each leader, recording every time one of the points of interest took place. The following table shows the average frequency for each point from all the observations done with both leaders.

Average frequency of observed action Number of observations: 20	
Action	Average frequency
Ask questions	14
Answer questions	5
Initiate conversation with participant (not asking questions)	7
Take part in conversation started by participant (not answering questions)	5
Corrects unwanted behavior	1
Give praise for good social behavior	3
Instructs/ describes situations	11

Ask questions: the leaders asked in average 14 questions in a period of 15 minutes. The questions differed in the way that sometimes they asked questions related to something the participant was talking about, and in other situations it was to ask if the participants needed anything. The leaders frequently asked questions concerning the member's personal life as well as how they are doing in the group. Observations show an interest in the member's well being as a part of the group as well as outside the group from the leaders.

Answers questions: as one can see in the table above, the leaders answered on average 5 questions. The leaders answered inquiries that the members had about the activity they are participating in as well as when the members asked personal questions, Initiates conversation: the leaders often initiate conversation with the members of the group. On many occasions, they start conversations between two or more of the members, and when the conversations flows naturally between the members the leader would pull away, often excusing themselves

to go do work, so that the members can continue the conversation on their own without making the members feel dismissed.

Partake in conversation: when a member of the group initiates in a conversation with a leader, they are quick to respond, showing interest in the member and what they have to say. On average this happened 5 times during the 15 minutes I observed them. This was not conversations started by the participants with a question.

Correct unwanted behavior: during the observations I actually did not observe many instances where the need for correcting behavior was a necessity, as all the members of the group seemed to have an understanding of the ground rules of how to behave within the group. The few times I saw any form of correction it was dealt with in a calm way that did not in any way draw attention to the member in question. A light tap on the arm and a low voiced instruction to the member was all that was needed. This makes for a more dynamic relationship between the members as none of them gets ostracized for their behavior.

Give praise: the leaders, on average gave the participants praise 3 times in the 15 minute period. The leaders were praising socially accepted behavior amongst the participants. This resulted in minimal need for correcting unwanted behavior. The leaders have been giving positive feedback on positive behavior which in turn will lead to a decrease of unwanted behavior.

Instructions and describing situations: this, in addition to asking questions, is the most frequent point in the observations, and happened on average 11 times during the 15 minute observation. The leaders, before starting any activity, would take time to describe and instruct the members of how to do the activity if this was necessary. Their focus was on making sure that everyone understood and could participate with the others. The leaders kept describing and instructing throughout the activity to making sure that everyone understood the task at hand, and no one was left out. Leader 1 has a very patient and pleasant way of explaining and instructing the participants.

Following is an example of the tally sheet used during my observations of the aforementioned points.

Time: 15 min Number of people attending: 12 Number of persons observed: 1 Setting: Collective dinner			
Action	Frequency	Total	Description
Ask question	IIIIIIIIIIIIIIII	16	
Answers question	IIIIII	6	
Initiates conversation with participant	IIIIII	8	Starts conversation (not by asking questions) between two or more participants, then pulls away
Take part in conversation started by participant	IIIIII	6	The participants start telling something, leader responds accordingly. It is not conversations started by questions
Corrects unwanted behavior		0	
Gives praise for good social behavior	IIIIII	5	
Instructs/ describes situations	IIIIIIIIII	11	

4.1.2 Results from continuous observation

Greet the participants: when the participants arrive, the leaders make sure to say hi to everyone that walks through the door. They will also sit down and talk to the participants for a little while.

Activities: the leaders are explaining all the activities that take place. One night the group played bingo. One of the participants was chosen to pick out the numbers, while another was chosen to call out the numbers. The leaders were both up at the table where this was taking place, guiding the two participants. The other participants were all teamed up with one sheet

per group. All through the activity the leaders helped in assisting the two participants in charge of the game, giving them help, as well as making sure all the other participants were taking part in the activity, and understanding what was going on. The team that won was awarded with a price from an arrangement of products that the group have gotten through donations from different companies. Communication between the leaders observed: as the leaders are social role models for the participants, it is important that the leaders have a good dynamic communication. Leader 1 and leader 2 work well together. During my observations I noticed that they have a positive tone amongst themselves, and they seem to have the same understanding as to how they communicate and work with the participants.

Before Christmas for instance, the participants were given the choice between two activities; making Christmas cards, or making gingerbread cookies. The two leaders I observed both lead one activity each. Leader 1 was in charge of the card making station while leader 2 led the gingerbread cookie station. Around the table where they were making Christmas cards, leader 1 was talking to all the participants, asking them what plans they had for Christmas and made sure everyone got to share their plans with the group. She was also helping them with spelling and writing where needed, making sure that all the participants was able to master the activity. Leader 1 was also good at giving positive feedback to the participants for their cards. The atmosphere was one of relaxation and high expectation. While the card making was taking place, the rest of the participants were making gingerbread cookies with leader 2. Also here did they talk about their plans for Christmas, and one of the participants was clearly looking forward to Christmas as a trip outside the country was on the agenda. Leader 2 made sure to ask questions about the trip as well as making sure everyone was getting their chance to tell about their Christmas plans. Also leader 2 was making sure to praise the participants for their work, and trying to keep everyone's attention on the shared activity. When the participants started losing interest in the activity however, leader 2 started a gingerbread dough fight with the participants. Everyone was clearly having a good time, sharing a fun experience together. This in turn led to something they all could talk about after the activity was done, and also something to share with the group that had been making Christmas cards in another room.

Seating around the dinner table and in activities: when sitting down for dinner, the leaders would spread out amongst the participants, as shown in the following picture

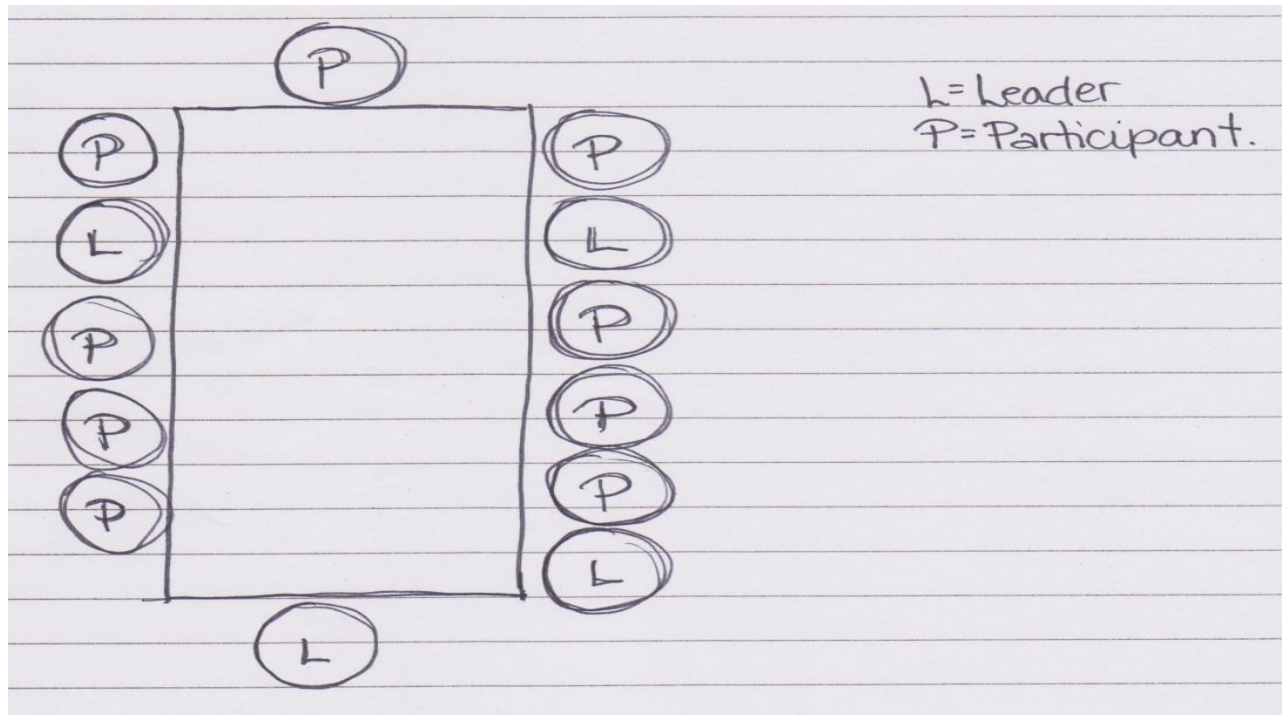


Figure 4.2: example diagram of how the leaders place themselves amongst the participants at the dinner table.

It was very random how they placed themselves every dinner situation, but the leaders always sat in between the participants, in every observation I conducted. In the particular setting that the drawing above is from, is the only time I observed one of the leaders actually sitting at the end of the table. This is both to help the participants who might need assistance, but also to be able to talk to the participants. By placing themselves amongst the participants, they open up for communication with the participants, as well as not differentiating themselves from the participants. During activities, the leaders would also spread out amongst the participants, splitting them into smaller groups. This made it easier for the participants as well as the leaders to talk and participate.

At one of my observations, the leaders gathered the group around the tables and told them all to sit down, because they had something important they wanted to talk to the participants about. They told the participants that they were getting a new member in their group that day, and spent time telling the participants that they had an obligation to make sure this new member felt welcome and that they had to make sure to include that person in all the activities they were doing that day. The participants seemed excited about the prospect of having a new member.

Creating the activity plan for the group: during one of my observations, I got to observe how the leaders create the activity plan for the group. The leaders gathered the participants and told them it was time to plan the activities for the next six months. Leader 1 was in charge of writing down the wishes of the participants, so she sat down at the head of the table, so that all the participants could see her. She explained that they needed all the participants to come up with ideas for activities, or mention what activities they had especially enjoyed in the last six months. Leader 2 sat in between all the participants making sure that everyone had the opportunity to say something. The leaders wrote down their wishes and then got together to plan things out. One of the aspects they took into consideration was to plan activities that cost a lot of money to a time of the month when they know the participants will receive their pension so that no one would be left out due to missing financial resources.

4.1.3 Results from duration observation

Body language of the leaders: I observed the body language of the leaders to see if their nonverbal communication with the participants were of a positive nature. Mostly, the leaders showed positive body language. I also recorded the time a conversation would last between a leader and a participant when the body language of the leader was positive as well as when it could be seen as negative or dismissive, and compare the length of time the conversations lasted in each situation.

The conversations where the leaders showed positive body language, the conversation would on average last 3-5 minutes longer than when they were being dismissive. During a dinner situation I observed that both leaders were leaning towards the participant they were talking to, with their arms leaning on the table and having eye contact with the participant. The conversations lasted longer when the leader was sitting like this, than when they were having a more closed off body language. One thing I noticed was that as soon as the leader leaned back and pulled away from the participant, the conversation would die down. This might seem harsh, but the leader and the participant were both giving signs that the topic they were talking about was drawing to a close. Once a new conversation started up, the leader would again lean forwards, clearly showing with their body language that they were actively taking part in the conversation.

Observation: body language and length of conversation		
Leader	Body language and time	Description
Leader 1	Positive body language Duration: 4 minutes	Leader 1 is sitting on opposite side of the table, leaning forward towards the participant. Her elbows are leaning on the table with her hands under her chin. Keeps eye contact with the participant. Quick to respond to the participant's inquiry and ask questions to deepen the conversation
Leader 1	Negative body language Duration: 1 minutes	Leader 1 is standing by the dishwasher with her back to the participant. The participant is asking a question, the leader does not turn around, but gives participant a look over her shoulder. Keeps putting things into the dishwasher. The participant walks away and joins the others.

Figure 4.1: example of observation sheet

Joking: both leaders were good at joking and making the tone light with the participants. When communicating it is important to know and respond to the person you are communicating with, and joking is one of the most complicated ways of communicating. Leader 2 was especially good at this. Even though the jokes sometimes could be directed directly at the participant's disability, it was a way of making the disability acceptable and something separate from the participant and not something that defines that person. To be able to do this one really needs to know the participant, and both leaders showed a great understanding for what was acceptable to joke with, and what was not. This is especially hard when one jokes about something as complicated as someone's disability. Leader 2 would also joke about her own shortcomings, making her more vulnerable in a way to the participants, and at the same time showing them that she is not perfect either.

4.1.4 Other observations

Difference between a small group and a larger group: it was, understandably, easier for the leaders to work with a smaller group than the big group. The difference however, was not as big as I had first expected. Although they did not have as much of a possibility to talk one-on-one in the bigger group they made sure to talk to, and acknowledge each participant.

5 Discussion

What can the results given in the text above really tell us? In the following part of this chapter I will discuss how the leaders in the particular facilitated recreational activity group I observed work to create an environment that promotes social development, or if it does at all.

5.1 In what way do the leaders of a facilitated recreational activity group create an environment that promotes social development?

As Ogden writes; to gain positive results, social skills have to be practiced in a social relation where the persons complement each other and recognizes each other's roles and contribution (2008).

Garbarino states that persons try to reach a universal need, so the person's social competence is adapted to the ecological niche it is in, and is not a general ability in itself. A person with disabilities might act different in contact with other persons with disabilities than they would with persons without disabilities (Ogden, 2008).

The leaders help create an environment that promotes social development through social inclusion, recognition and acceptance of the participants as individuals and as a group, adaption of activities to the participants' abilities and interests as well as in the way they communicate with the participants.

So, are the leaders actually doing this? That is what my sub-questions were aimed at finding out, and will be discussed in the following text.

5.1.1 Are the leaders using positive communication and active listening when communicating with the participants?

As mentioned earlier, positive communication and active listening is important in interpersonal relations. In active listening, the listener in a communication situation is showing through verbal and nonverbal communication that they are participating in the communication (Nordland, 2009; Bø and Helle, 2008). The leaders show that they are

actively listening to the participants. By asking questions, the leaders get the participants to talk more, and by paraphrasing what the participant is saying they show that they have understood and heard what the participant is saying. When one is working with persons with disabilities, it is especially important to show that one is interested in what the person has to say, and that what the person is saying is valuable. The leaders created this through active listening, and by using positive body language.

Positive communication is achieved through active listening. It is important that the leaders acknowledges and stimulates those resources that are available within a group. This demands an appropriate composition of a group, motivation and a group leader that understands the group members' needs (Nordland, 2009; Gjertsen, 2010).

It is important that the leaders acknowledges and stimulates those resources that are available within a group. Each person within the group is a unique person as well as a member of the group. The leaders show that they see the participants as individuals with different abilities, strengths and weaknesses. They show this in the way they talk to the participants, adapting their language in a way that is understandable to each participant, in the way they greet the participants by name and saying hi when they arrive at the facility, as well as in the way they plan and conduct activities. If the group is to function as a tool for development and learning, there has to be a personal relation and cooperation amongst its participants. This demands an appropriate composition of a group, motivation and a group leader that understands the group members' needs. The leader must set boundaries and structures, but be careful not to steer the group in a way that makes it hard for the members to take advantage of the things the others have to offer (Gjertsen, 2010)

Active listening, as mentioned, is when the listener in a communication situation is showing through verbal and nonverbal communication that they are participating in the communication. When talking to the participants, the leaders paraphrase a lot of the things the participants say as well as asking questions to get the participant to continue talking. Sometimes it seems like it is hard for the participants to maintain a conversation so the leaders ask questions to keep the participant from falling out completely.

The ICDP, though originally directed towards caregiver of young children, can be adapted to include work with adult persons with disabilities (Rye, 2001). The ICDP can be used as a tool to create positive communication between caretaker and recipient. In the group I observed, I

noticed many aspects of the ICDP being used. One activity in particular stuck out in connection to the ICDP.

During one of my observations, the group had a yatsy-tournament. Yatsy is a dice-game that requires you to know basic mathematics skills, which is still hard for a few of the participants. The leaders divided the participants into four smaller groups and the leaders spread out amongst them. The leaders were there to direct and help the participants, as well as play the game and keep track of the score. During the game I noticed that both leader 1 and leader 2 were explaining the rules to some of the participants in their group as well as helping the participants understand which dice to save and which ones to throw again. To keep the participants' interest in the game, leader 2 made a lot of jokes during the game, as well as explaining to the participants what they were supposed to do at every point. When the participants did especially well in one round, leader 2 would cheer and congratulate them and show a lot of enthusiasm and after a little while the participants would join in and joke with the leader when she did badly in one round as well as cheering her on when she did well. Leader 1 was a lot quieter when playing with her group of participants, but worked in the same way as leader 2. Both leaders spent time talking to the participants about other things as well during the game, but tried to make sure that the participants were all paying attention to the game.

All the eight guiding lines for the ICDP can be found in this observation. Demonstrating positive feelings by showing enthusiasm and making sure the participants are all having a good time. The game could be a little complicated to some of the participants, but the leaders adapted it to their skills by helping to explain the rules and what would be the best move for the participant to make. Talking, elaborating and explaining to the participants were taking place the whole time, this in turn helped the participants to focus their attention to the game and could help give meaning to the experience the participants were having. By cheering the participants on and congratulating them for good rounds, the leaders were giving praise and acknowledgement as well as receiving the same from the participants, which is important for positive communication. And last but not least, the leaders kept explaining the rules and how to play leading to self-discipline with the participants. They have to learn to wait their turn, and follow the rules. This game is predictable and a little challenging in that sense and the easy rules motivates for continued participation (Rye, 2001).

5.1.2 Do the leaders make sure all participants are included in the activities? And how do they include everyone?

When conducting activities, the leaders make sure to include everyone, as far as it is possible. They do not force people to take part in activities they do not wish to take part in, and sometimes the leaders arrange for two or more activities to take place at once to make sure everyone has the opportunity to participate, and to get positive results and feeling of accomplishment. The two different activities that were available for the participants before Christmas is a good example of how the leaders try to include everyone in the activities. By adapting the activities to the participants' interests and abilities, participating in the activities are motivating and fun. As well as following the interests of the participants, the leaders also spent time explaining and instructing the participants throughout the activities so that no one would lose motivation due to not mastering the activities. Like the ICDP states, it is important that the leaders give meaning to the participant's experiences. The leaders need to make their instructions meaningful for the participants, as well as show their own enthusiasm and personal involvement (Rye, 2001). To make sure all participants are included, the leaders should also help the participant focus their attention. To be able to do this, the leaders have to make sure they have the participants' full attention (Rye, 2001).

Another aspect of inclusion is not making a participants' biggest challenge become a focus for the other participants. This can be anything from mental challenges, like lacking mathematical skills as mentioned in the yatsy-tournament situation, or physical challenges, or the need for personal assistance. One of the participants comes to every activity with an assistant from his home, and the leaders make sure to treat that assistant as a valued member of the group and the assistant participates in all the activities as if they were indeed a member of the group. This is an important aspect when it comes to creating social development, as this particular participant of the group is the only one to have an assistant with them, and that it will not stigmatize the participant.

All the participants in the facilitated recreational activity group are in the mild degree of developmental disability category. These persons understand and can communicate, but might have problems with conceptual understanding. Persons in this category have the ability for

social adaption (Rognhaug and Gommæs, 2008; Tidemand-Andersen, 2008). It is especially important to create activities that promotes peer cooperation and relations by being inclusive as they might need help to create bonds with others on their own.

5.1.3 Are the leaders giving the participants socially valid roles?

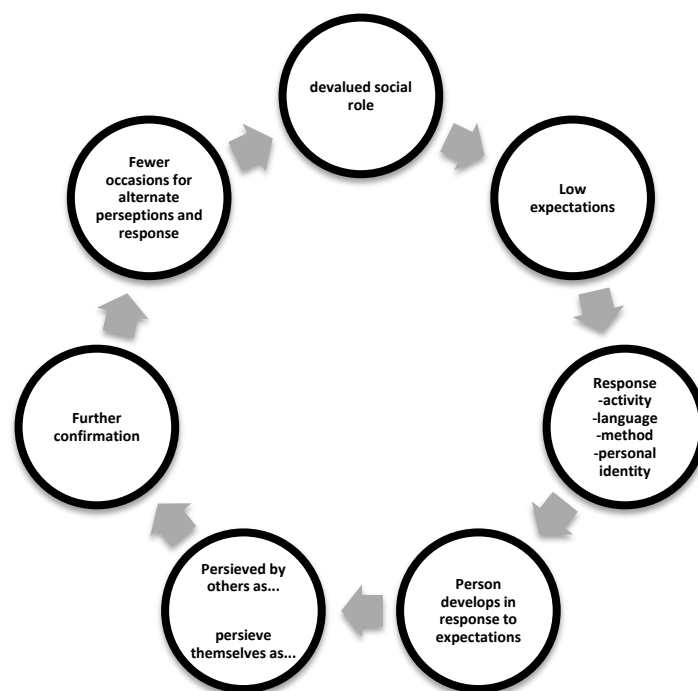
What is a socially valued and valid role? That depends completely on the situation, and is defined by the social situation. The social roles were clear when it came to the roles of leader and participant. In some situations however, the leaders removed their “leader attitude” in favor of a more friendly approach towards the participant. The participants were given socially valid roles by being an active member of the group. By helping the leaders out with different tasks, the participants can experience a feeling of being worth.

The leaders have a challenging job when it comes to making everyone feel like a valued member of the group. To be able to make everyone feel like a valid member of the group, one needs to create positive roles and role expectations. The leaders accomplish showing that the persons are valid members by listening and responding in kind to the participants, as well as giving them tasks throughout the activity, like leaders of different games, or helping out with making dinner. As for role expectation, the participants are expected to be positive participants, to help each other and the leaders, and to partake in the activities as much as possible. It is of course very hard to create activities that fits everyone, but the leaders do their best to get everyone involved and having a good time.

The leaders show that they have high expectations for the participants in the sense that they do not underestimate the participants’ abilities. This is shown in different ways through both the activities they give the participants as well as in the way they talk to them. The response the leaders give the participants is mostly positive, the exception being when they correct unwanted behavior. This is seen in the way the leaders arrange activities that all can take part in, either because they are able to master it on their own or with help and guidance from the leaders and peers. The language, both verbal and nonverbal is positive and they talk and explain in a way that everyone can understand. In addition to that, the participants are allowed to be themselves. The leaders see them as persons, and not as their disability. This can be seen in the way the leaders joke about things, and the way they interact with the participants.

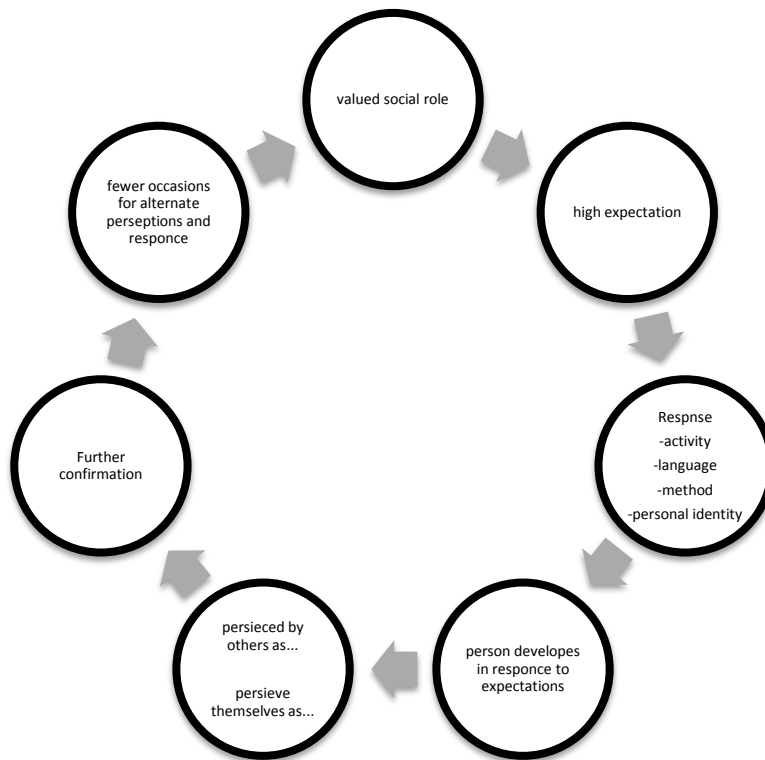
By giving the participants socially valid roles, the leaders can influence the way the participants view themselves. One can look at the activity where the group is making dinner together. Even though the leaders are clearly in charge, the participants get to be a valued part in the activity and within the group when contributing. The persons helping to prepare dinner by cutting vegetables are actively participating and creating results that are important for the whole dinner making process. This is also applicable to the participants who are setting the table. When the leader asks the participants to take part in preparing the food or on the occasions where the participants had to prepare food on their own, they are giving the participants roles and tasks that they all get a result from, and shared experiences.

Persons who are predisposed to be devalued must be given the opportunity to experience a feeling of accomplishment, worth and that they are a positive addition to a society, or the group. If one once again looks at Kristiansen's model for role circulation, and the negative aspects of this, one can get a picture of how important it is to give the participants positive and valued roles within the group (Askheim, 2008).



With changing persons' perception of themselves from something negative, and continually enforcing the persons' feeling of value, the negative reinforcement of roles can be turned

around. By giving the participants valued roles within a group, the circle will change a little for the person



A person must be given a valued role within a social setting and given the opportunity to learn the necessary skills to function adequately within a group. It's all about adapting social skills to the person's ability and makes it functional in the group the person is a member of. It is also important to give the person the possibility to contribute to the groups' productivity and mood in a positive way and to receive positive feedback on this. One good example of this was when the group had an Iranian themed dinner and evening. When the food was being made, leader 1 started telling the participants some facts about Iran. One of the participants knew a lot about the countries in the Middle East, so after a while leader 1 included the participant in telling the others about the country. This gave the participant the possibility to contribute to the group's common activity with his vast knowledge. The other participants as well as the leader asked the participant questions and showed interest in what the participant had to say. The other participants were very positive to this and the participant was given a positive role, contributed to both the mood and the productivity of the group as well as the participant receiving a lot of positive feedback.

The participants need an opportunity to develop new competence, and especially competence that is valued by the society. It is also important to construct groups in ways that give positive model-learning and peer-to-peer learning. Activities must be adapted to each person's level of competence and potential for development (Askheim, 2008).

5.1.4 Are the activities adapted to the needs of the participants?

The group as a whole has a need for planning out activities ahead of time. They have a program planned for a period of six months at a time, and I was lucky enough to be able to observe the creation of the upcoming six month plan for the group. The leaders gathered all the participants in the main room, and leader 1 sat in a spot that made it possible for everyone to see her. She then went on to explain what they were about to do and gave everyone a little time to think of activities they would like to see on the new program. One by one the participants were able to come up with suggestions, and leader 2 made sure that everyone was given a chance to contribute while leader 1 wrote down all the suggestions. This is important because it gives the participants the opportunity to shape the program for the upcoming six month period, as well as voice their wishes for activities, and it gives the leaders the opportunity to adapt the program to the participants as far as it is doable within the allotted time they have, and that it is economically feasible. The leaders put emphasis on creating and completing activities that everyone could take a part in, and show positive results at the end of it. As the ICDP states, it is important that the leaders adapt to the participant. Adapting the way the leaders work with, and relate to the participants in a way that one addresses and acknowledges the participants' initiative and individuality is important also when creating activities that are as adapted to the participants as possible (Rye, 2001). It is of course not possible to adapt everything to suit all participants, but the leaders do their best to meet the interests of the majority. The leaders have a responsibility to follow the cues of the participants and that they direct their focus to the interest of the participants (Rye, 2001).

5.2 Social development

I do still have some questions however as to how aware the leaders are of their actual effect on the group in general. Is the seating arrangement around the dinner table planned, or is it coincidental? Do the leaders know that this has a positive effect on the participants in the way of feeling a connection to the leaders? These questions are impossible to answer without

doing in depth interviews with the leaders themselves. What is clear through my observations, and also what I experienced with the group, is that the leaders do have a clear goal that every member is to feel like a valued member, that participates on an equal basis as everyone else and to feel like an included member of the group as a whole.

As mentioned earlier, each person within a group is a unique person as well as a member of a group. If the group is to function as a tool for development and learning, there has to be a personal relation and cooperation amongst its participants. This demands a group leader that understands the individual needs of the participants as well as an appropriate composition of the group members and motivation (Gjertsen, 2010)

One of the key aspects for any person when it comes to social development is a feeling of belonging. As Ogden points out, all persons prefer to contact arenas where they feel accomplished and accepted for who they are (2008). Every time I visited the facilitated recreational activity group, I noticed that all participants, with few exceptions, showed up and took part in all activities. This can be seen as a product of an environment that is open and acceptable, where the participants feel accomplished and accepted for who they are. If the opposite was the case, the participants would not be so active in the group as it is voluntary to participate, and they can chose if they want to be a part of it or not. It is also, probably easier for the leaders to create an environment that is positive when the dynamic of the group is already good.

Gersham and Elliot's seven points of social skills needed for development of social competence is a good reference point for seeing if the leaders create a positive environment that can lead to social development.

1. Social skills are learned through observation, practice and feedback. By giving a lot of praise, the leaders are giving positive feedback to the participants. Through observing the leaders, the participants were able to copy their social behavior. One participant in particular seemed to copy the leaders a lot.
2. It consists of specific verbal and non-verbal behavior. Body language is specifically important in social situations. The leaders show positive body language that signals to the participants that they are willing to communicate. When sitting and talking they show attentiveness by leaning towards the person, having eye contact and seem relaxed and present.

3. Take initiative and respond in ways adapted to the situation and give wanted results.
The leaders did take a lot of initiative. For example when they saw the participants just sitting there, the leaders would go initiate conversations between the participants. When the conversations was running smoothly between the participants the leader would excuse herself and walk away, or just naturally pull out of the conversation letting the participants take over. Also, when the participants talked to the leaders, the leaders would respond in ways that was adapted to the situation, meaning that if the participant was joking, the leader would respond by laughing and answer in the same way, and if the participant wanted to talk about something serious, they would respond appropriately.
4. Increases possibility for social confirmation. The leaders give social confirmation in the form of seeing each participant. They also show social confirmation in giving praise when the participants are showing socially approved behavior. By not drawing attention to unwanted behavior, they reduce the risk of the participants being ostracized for the few times they act in a socially unacceptable way.
5. Interactive by nature, adapted to situation and gives wanted reactions. Social development is interactive. By making an environment that is accepting and nurturing, the leaders make sure the participants returns to the activity and participate in the social setting that is a facilitated recreational activity group.
6. The practice is influenced by characteristics in the environment. The leaders adapted the activities to the participants' abilities, making them hard enough to challenge them, but not so easy they would get bored. It made it necessary for the participants to cooperate. When they were playing games, it was always games that were meant to be played in groups, and the leaders would spread out to make sure everyone was participating and understanding the game.
7. Faults and overstatement can be used as subjects for interventions. The leaders did not have to correct a lot of socially unwanted behavior, but when they did it was dealt with in a quiet way to not draw attention it from the other participants. One of the participants had a habit of correcting the behavior of one of the other participants. The leaders took this a little more serious than a lot of the other negative behavior. This was because participant one would correct unwanted behavior from the other participant that participant one personally found offensive. The leaders corrected participant one on many occasions, telling that participant it was their job to deal with

this and that participant two was not doing anything wrong, and in their group, one looks after oneself (Ogden, 2008).

To gain positive results, social skills have to be practiced in a social relation where the persons complements each other and recognizes each other's roles and contributions. Again, the emphasis the leaders have on complimenting the socially positive behavior that the participants show is important. It shows that the leaders are aware of the contribution the participants are bringing to the group. The leaders and the participants seem to complement each other in the sense that there is good communication within the group, and they have an easy dynamic, but there is still a clear difference in the roles between the leaders and the participants. The different roles within the group can be friendship between peers, or relation between members and leaders of a recreational activity group. In these types of relations, both are dependent on each other's contribution to succeed in one's role and to succeed reaching one's social role. The participants are dependent on the fact that the leaders sometimes act as leaders and not as a "friend" when communicating. At the same time it is important that the leaders show that they are not only there to run the group but be a confidant and someone the participants can talk to. When I observed the leaders, they showed a good understanding of when what role was appropriate to use. On one occasion one of the participants started crying and leader 1 went over to ask what was wrong. When the participant did not want to talk about it, the leader led the participant out of the room to talk in private. At that point leader 1 took the role as a friend more than a leader. The give and take so to speak in communication between the leaders and the participants is reflected in the mutual bond between the two.

6 Facilitated recreational activity groups – an arena for social development?

The focus of my study was one recreational activity group of about 20 member and four leaders. I spent a lot of time in the group doing multiple observations.

The theme of the observation has been social development, and the observations have been based on different aspects that might be seen as important for social development. Since this research is only done on a small scale, mainly one recreational activity group, the results are only applicable to this one group, and cannot be generalized.

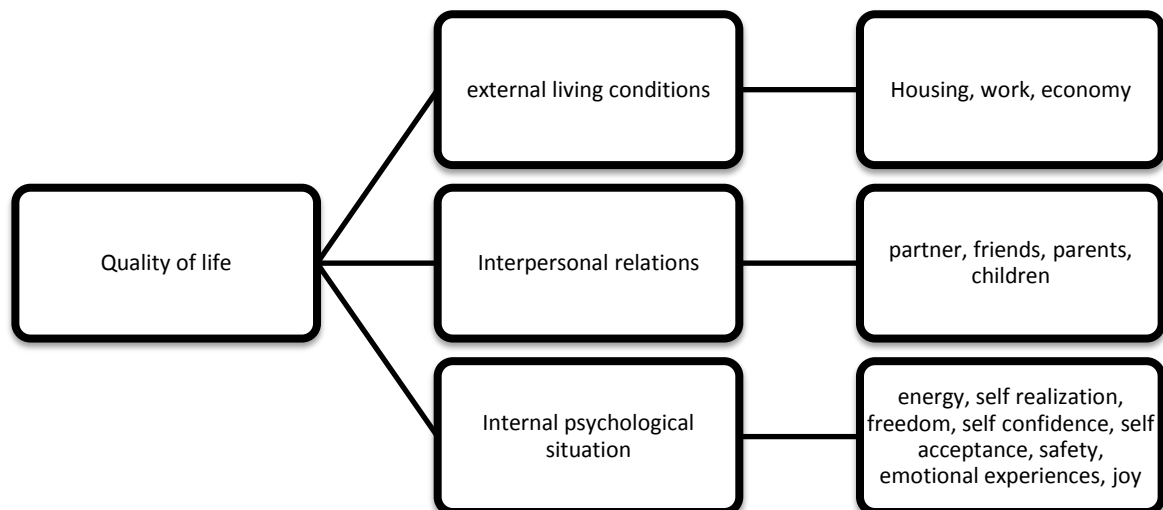
In my research, I did a number of observations in the same setting over a period of time to see if the results were conclusive. What I found was that on a general basis, the results were conclusive in the way that all the same points in my observation form were met in each observation. However I cannot say for certain that there is reliability to my research as I cannot say that another researcher would be able to recreate the observations with similar results.

According to the UN-Convention and the Anti Discrimination and Accessibility Act, all persons should have access to recreational activities. This is especially important for persons with mild degree of disabilities, as they have a great possibility and ability for social adaption and development. In a research conducted by Jorun Ramm in 2010, she found that 23 percent of the participants with disabilities had felt quite or very lonely in the last 14 days leading up to the research, compared to only 6 percent of the population of persons without disabilities. It is especially young persons under the age of 45 that experiences loneliness. In addition, persons with disabilities experience more psychological distress than the overall population. Approximately 46 percent of persons with disabilities compared to only 12 percent in the population in general. This might be due to the fact that disabilities result in lower participation in many activities, especially social activities. Participation in social activities and social interaction is an important source for excess energy and pleasure (Ramm, 2010). As mentioned earlier in the theoretical chapter, groups have been created to help and support persons that have special needs. The feeling of mastering and acknowledgement is connected to the individual's social development. As the preamble to the UN-Convention says;

“disability is an evolving concept and that disability results from the interaction between persons with impairments and attitudinal and environmental barriers that hinders their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others” (United Nations, 2006)

Leaders have an important role when it comes to creating a developing process within a group. These points can, or should, involve planning and initiating, as well as suggesting, informing, clarifying, interpreting, supporting and adapting activities that are beneficial for the group and their development. In addition it is important that the leader is a role model for the members. To be a role model for problem solving and by underlining certain values and attitudes that is positive for the group’s development gives the group leader a central function as a process creator within the group. Their goal is to make the group a resource to the individual person. It is important that the leader acknowledges and stimulates those resources that are available within a group (Gjertsen, 2010).

The positive inclusion into a social setting can have an effect on other aspects on a participants’ life



What I have found in my research is that a facilitated recreational activity group can be a good tool in the development of social skills for adults with disabilities.

The goal of a facilitated recreational activity group is to

- Give each other support when needed
- Practice mutual control
- Identify hidden emotion and a feeling of strength
- Remedy the feeling of isolation or deviance through generalization
- Make successful self representation through collective strength (Gjertsen, 2010)

There are many positive aspects of the work the leaders are doing. Most notable is that they show acceptance of each participant in different ways. Not everyone in the group has as much need for being given socially valued roles as others, and the leaders are good at balancing this out. Also, some participants need more confirmation than others for their contribution in the group. The fact that the leaders creates a positive environment that is open for everyone and where the participators' disabilities are not seen as something negative in a person is very positive. The disability is not the thing that defines the participant, but is simply a part of their personality. The leaders also create situations where the participants can experience the feeling of recognition, belonging and mastering. This is not only necessary for the participants, but for the leaders as well. And last, but not least, they are giving the participants socially valid roles, which is important for feeling accepted and for learning and development.

During my observations, I mainly focused on the work the leaders did to promote social development, but I did notice some negative aspects although there were not many of them. I have to point out the negative communication between a few of the leaders, although this does not apply to the communication between the two leaders I observed, it can still affect the participants. The last point is not really directed at the leaders in general, but I cannot really say anything about how aware the leaders are of the part they have as social role models for the participants. It is not really anything you can observe, but considering the fact that the leaders were very aware of how they worked to make sure all the participants were enjoying themselves, it could be interesting to know something about this.

Is there room for improvement within the work the leaders do to create an environment or arena that nurtures social development? As in all work where people are concerned, there is always room for improvement. However, the basics are there for creating an environment that does nurture social learning and development for the participants. As I asked earlier in the discussion, how aware are the leaders of the actual effect they have on the group in general? This could be an aspect for the leaders to work on. Thinking about, and becoming aware of their roles as role models for the participants, and maybe also be aware of their own actions, not only towards the participants, but towards each others as leaders as well.

For the leaders to become even better at creating positive communication and active listening, it might be beneficial for them to study both the main points of the ICDP, as well as study and be aware of the 13 steps to becoming a better listener, and a good active listener that John Grohol has created

Leaders have an important role when it comes to creating a developing process within a group. These points can, or should, involve planning and initiating, as well as suggesting, informing, clarifying, interpreting, supporting and adapting activities that are beneficial for the group and their development. When all this is in place, a facilitated recreational activity group can function as an arena for social development, and can help give adults with disabilities a better perception of themselves and a feeling of belonging. From my findings during my observations I have seen that all the elements needed for social development is present as the situation is today. The participants are given socially valid roles within the group, the leaders encourages them to participate, the participants are creating meaningful relationships with each other as well as with the leaders, and the leaders are communicating with the participants in a positive way and actively listening to the participants' need, wishes and general conversation. Whether or not social development is actually happening within the group is hard to say anything about as I have not studied the participants in that aspect, nor have I spent enough time or conducted enough in depth research to say anything for sure about this aspect. But as I said, all the elements are there for an environment that promotes social development, through the work the leaders are doing.

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Appendix

Forespørsel om deltakelse i forskningsprosjektet

”Facilitated Recreational Activities- An Arena for Social Development?”

Hei

Mitt navn er Stine Hoelsæther. Jeg er student ved Universitetet i Oslo og jobber for tiden med min masteroppgave innen feltet spesialpedagogikk. I min masteroppgave ønsker jeg å skrive om hvordan det blir tilrettelagt for et godt sosialt miljø innen tilrettelagte fritidsgrupper. I denne forbindelse ønsker jeg å observere gruppelederens samspill med brukerne, og håper du vil være villig til å delta på dette.

Jeg har et ønske om å observere hvordan ledere jobber med brukerne, og derfor ønsker jeg at akkurat du skal delta.

Hva innebærer deltakelse i studien?

Først av alt vil jeg påpeke at all informasjon jeg samler inn vil være anonym og kan på ingen måte spores tilbake til deg, da verken personnavn, fritidsgruppens navn eller kommune vil nevnes i oppgaven. Da jeg kun skal observere deg i arbeid med brukere vil din eneste aktive deltakelse i min undersøkelse kun omhandle din daglige jobb og vil ikke ta opp noe tid utenom arbeidstiden din. Hver observasjon vil være korte, og jeg vil på ingen måte forstyrre ditt daglige arbeid.

De opplysninger jeg kommer til å innhente er samspillet mellom leder og bruker, så ingen direkte personlige opplysninger om deg eller bruker vil samles inn. All data som blir samlet inn gjennom observasjon vil være skriftlig og vil bli samlet i et datadokument som er passordbeskyttet.

Hva skjer med informasjonen om deg?

Alle personopplysninger vil bli behandlet konfidensielt og det er kun jeg som har tilgang til innsamlet data.

Prosjektet skal etter planen avsluttes i løpet av mai 2014, og vil være tilgjengelig for deg i løpet av juni dersom dette er av interesse.

Det er frivillig å delta i studien, og du kan når som helst trekke ditt samtykke uten å oppgi noen grunn. Dersom du ønsker å delta eller har spørsmål til studien, ta kontakt med meg på telefon 950 02 624 eller på epost stineih@student.utvit.uio.no. Det er også mulig å kontakte min veileder ved Universitetet, Steinar Theie, på steinar.theie@isp.uio.no eller telefon 22858058

Studien er meldt til Personvernombudet for forskning, Norsk samfunnsvitenskapelig datatjeneste AS.

Samtykke til deltakelse i studien

Jeg har mottatt informasjon om studien, og er villig til å delta

(Signert av prosjektdeltaker, dato)